

Rides and Rescues: Cliffs, Cops and Chaos

By John Hawkins

In 1964, a chase movie was filmed in Lafayette and surrounding areas by a bunch of Acalanes High and DVC students, including me, the primary photographer. Famous for how many cars were destroyed in and about Lafayette, here's the story of "Rides & Rescues".

Originally the film was "Rides, Rapes & Rescues", a title lifted from a Spike Jones record album of music inspired by common plots of early movies. Articles by Oakland Tribune and other papers renamed the movie "Rides & Rescues", however, neither name matches the movie's plot, which is really just "rides". For shorthand, we creators always call it The Movie.

The plot has a gang robbing First Western Bank in Lafayette. While counting the money at their hideout in Walnut Creek (the old Dollar Ranch), a second gang busts in, grabs the loot, and a car chase and mayhem ensues all over Lafayette, Orinda, Moraga, Walnut Creek, Briones and Bear Creek valleys (before flooded by a reservoir), plus a few shots in Oakland, San Francisco, and Emeryville.

Many innocent people become involved, and so did their cars. We became notorious for wrecking cars, about two dozen, mostly by sending them off cliffs. I had lots of fun filming those one-take scenes, and sometimes dodging the flying cars. How could we afford to wreck so many cars? After we paid for the first 2 or 3 cars (\$5 to \$15 was the price range) people started to donate cars just for the privilege of watching us film them crashing and/or going off cliffs.

Lafayette landmark Chaps drive-in was our production "office", where we'd meet after school and on weekends to organize the day's "shoot". The actors were local students, whomever was hanging around Chaps that day.

The audition to be an actor was to hand over \$5, which we used to buy film. We never had a shortage of actors or film.

CHP and Sheriff patrols would come across us now and then, but never quite grasped what we were doing. We persuaded one CHP officer to activate his red light and give chase; he pursued the panel truck with me filming from the roof trapdoor. Then using movie magic we sent him off a cliff.

A mysterious character recurs throughout Rides & Rescues, showing up in scenes in Lafayette, San Francisco (the baseball diamond of Candlestick Park), and the Kaiser Building in Oakland. He's a mystery until the movie finale.

Rides & Rescues premiered at Acalanes High School, sponsored by Oakland Tribune who rented the auditorium and a huge searchlight for the evening (see photo below). The Trib's film critic wrote a review, devoting his entire column.

We invited Lafayette CHP and Sheriff officers to the premiere. At the end, one officer said "excellent movie, but you are fortunate I didn't catch you filming it".

As word spread we were publicized in Lafayette Sun and other papers, and interviewed on KSFO radio. Standard Oil (today known as Chevron) called and we showed Rides & Rescues in their San Francisco board room.

These days, aside from the still-amazing acting, stunts and photography, Rides & Rescues is a fun look at Lafayette and the area back in the day.

As listed in the credits, Rides & Rescues features these fine Lafayette thespians: Jeff Davis, Hillard Ebding, John Hawkins, Dennis Salvo (producers/directors/actors), plus (alphabetical order) Steve Bava, Diann Beconcini, Frank Broadhead, Jeff Bugge, Craig Davis, Tom Deguerhey, Rick Ames, Dawn Dressler, Mary Ferguson, Jim Fletcher, Jim Foley, George Hamilton, Van Hill, Rich Holmes, Doug Kelly, Tod Kilbourn, Tom Kilbourn, Ron Leonard, Karl Matthes, Karen Muscheid, Pat Patton, Ginny Rapp, Ken Salvo, Dave Shank, Steve Shank, and one unknown CHP officer.